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MFI Technical Report 98-5

**Military Adolescents: Their Strengths and Vulnerabilities
Analysis of Focus Groups**

Nancy M. Nagy
Douglas Lare
Dorothy J. Jeffreys
Jeffrey D. Leitzel

September 1998

MILITARY FAMILY INSTITUTE
MARYWOOD UNIVERSITY, SCRANTON, PA

19990104 045



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Military Family Institute
Marywood University
2300 Adams Avenue
Scranton, PA 18509
[HTTP://MFI.MARYWOOD.EDU](http://MFI.MARYWOOD.EDU)
PHONE: (717) 961-4716

Michael D. Shaler, M.B.A.
Director

Alan M. Levine, Ph.D., R.D.
Deputy Director for Research

Joseph G. Giacomci, M.B.A.
Deputy Director for Administration

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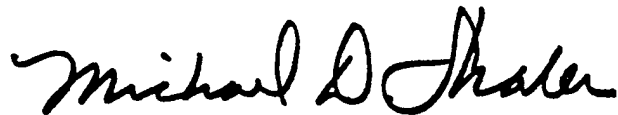
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Foreword

In this report Dr. Dorothy Jeffreys continues her in-depth study of military adolescents by analyzing the responses of focus groups that were convened during the conduct of the extensive research (and reported in MFI Technical Report 97-4, *Military Adolescents: Their Strengths and Vulnerabilities*).

The remarks from these young men and women living on or near military installations around the globe, help enhance our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing them as they move from base to base and transfer to yet another school in an unfamiliar setting. Listening to the comments from these adolescents helps us understand how the moniker of 'military brat' came to be a term of endearment.

The insights provided by Dr. Jeffreys in this and her other published research provide a deeper understanding of these young men and women as they grow and mature.



Michael D. Shaler
Director

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their appreciation to the many people who made this research possible, and especially to the following, all of who greatly contributed to the success of the project.

First and foremost, we wish to thank Congressman Joseph McDade without whose vision the Military Family Institute would not be a reality. We are also grateful to Ms. Carolyn H. Becraft, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Personnel Support, Families, and Education); Mrs. Gail H. McGinn, Principal Director (Personnel Support, Families and Education); Ms. Linda Smith, Director (Office of Family Policy); Col. John Nelson, USAF; LTC Daniel F. McFerran, USA; Col. Willard Mollerstrom, USAF; and Ms. Patty Kasold, Child Development Specialist (Office of Family Policy) for their support in assuring us access and cooperation from the services. From the services, we thank Ms. Aggie Byers, Mr. Jose Martinez and Ms. Sandra Wood (Army), Dr. Beverly Smalzreid, Ms. Mary Alice Howe, and Ms. Joyce Brown (Air Force), Ms. Madeline Wagner (Marine Corps), and Ms. Pam Crespi and Ms. Jane Rodgers (Navy). Our sincere thanks to Mr. Matthew Boehmer, Defense Manpower Data Center, for preparation of the sampling frame. We also give thanks to the personnel who extended their time, cooperation and hospitality, at all of the installations visited during the course of this project. Appreciation is also given to Dr. Karol Krotki, Dr. Gary Bowen and Dr. Joseph Pittman who provided their expertise.

At the Military Family Institute (MFI) we are indebted to many colleagues. These individuals include Mr. Michael D. Shaler, Dr. Alan Levine, Mr. Joseph G. Giacofci, Dr. Peter J. McNelis, and Dr. Douglas Muller; as well as Research Associates: Ms. Jolene Chomko, Ms. Lea M. Dougherty, Mr. Timothy Gilroy, Mrs. Allyson Murphy-Schaffer, Ms. Cynthia Shilanskis; Graduate Assistants: Miss Nicole Charlton, Ms. Bobbie Britt, Ms. Kelly Brown, Ms. Erica DeSantis, Ms. Kristin Dionne, Ms. Chris Gallo, Ms. Ann Gardner, Ms. Maria Gonzales, Ms. Megan Haggerty, Ms. Lisa Hardin, Ms. Jennifer Harniman, Ms. Lisa Kendall, Mrs. Jennifer Long, Ms. Andrea Oravec, Ms. Christie Phillips, Ms. Petra Stone, Ms. Sarah VanBelle, Ms. Kimberlee Victoria, Ms. Alisha Williams; also Mrs. Judith Page, Editorial Assistant, Dr. Peggy McClure, Senior Scientist and Ms. Kim Colurso, Administrative Assistant.

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Maxine Thompson, Ph.D. (North Carolina State University)

Most importantly, we are deeply indebted to the adolescents who shared their feelings and opinions as well as to their families, who supported their participation. Without them there would have not been a study.

Thank you one and all.

About the Authors

Nancy M. Nagy, Ph.D., earned a B.A. and an M.A. in Elementary Education from Wilkes University as well as a Ph.D. in Education from Temple University. She is an Assistant Professor in the Education Department of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Marywood University. She is also the Director of the Graduate Reading Program at Marywood. She has taught at Temple University and Kean College.

Douglas Lare, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate Education Department at Marywood University, Scranton, PA. He received his Ed.D. from Lehigh University and his Ed.M. from Harvard University. Dr. Lare has been a teacher, school administrator, and central office administrator in a variety of public and private schools in Minnesota, New Jersey, Iowa and Pennsylvania. He remains involved in schools, focusing on educational reform and school/business relationships.

Dorothy J. Jeffreys, Ph.D., is a Professor in the School of Social Work, Marywood University, Scranton, PA. She served as the Principal Investigator of the "Military Adolescents: Their Strengths & Vulnerabilities" study, MFI Technical Report 97-4. Dr. Jeffreys is a licensed social worker in PA. She has also served as a co-investigator on the Women Aboard Ship Study conducted by the Naval Health Research Center, San Diego, CA. Dr. Jeffreys received her Ph.D. in Social Work and Developmental Psychology and her M.S.W. from the University of Michigan. She also holds an M.A. in Developmental Psychology and a B.A. in psychology from Oakland University.

Jeffrey D. Leitzel, M.A., served as Research Associate on the "Military Adolescents: Their Strengths & Vulnerabilities" study at the MFI. Mr. Leitzel received his B.S. in Psychology from the Pennsylvania State University and his M.A. in Psychology from Marywood. He is an adjunct faculty member in the Counseling/Psychology and Nutrition and Dietetics Departments at Marywood. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Human Development, Counseling Psychology Specialization at Marywood University.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This qualitative data is intended to supplement the quantitative information from 6,382 surveys administered to adolescents living in military families (Jeffreys, et al., 1997). The intention of these "focus groups" was to give the adolescents an opportunity to respond to issues raised in the survey in more detail.

Methodology

After they completed the survey and took a brief break, the adolescents were asked to participate in an extended focus group. They were informed that the topics would be similar to those in the survey, but that they would have the opportunity to talk in greater detail about these with a facilitator. Participation in these groups was voluntary. Discussions were held separately for three age groups (10-12 year olds, 13-14 year olds, 15-18 year olds) with the intention of providing the adolescents with as comfortable an atmosphere for discussion as possible. A total of 52 focus groups were conducted during data collection for the adolescent project. There were 17 discussion groups with 10-12 year-olds, 17 with 13-14 year olds, and 18 with 15-18 year olds. The facilitators were trained by the Principal Investigator and Research Associate for the project. Questions (see Appendix A) ranged from the very general, such as "what is life like for you?" to specific questions about such topics as moving and growing up on military installations. The facilitators were given some latitude to explore issues raised by the participants. Sessions were audio taped and transcribed. Data analysis was then conducted by two qualitative researchers, who analyzed the transcribed data for common themes and trends.

Participants

Of the total of 6,382 adolescents who participated in the survey, 383 participated in these focus groups, averaging about 7 youths per group.

Findings

Attitudes Toward Moving

- All groups expressed remorse about leaving old friends. All groups expressed excitement about meeting new friends.
- Older students are concerned about the lack of uniformity between school curricula and programs.
- All groups expressed enthusiasm about new experiences, such as meeting new people, making new friends, exploring new places. Reasons are complex and diverse with respect to why students look forward to moving.

Parental Relationships

- Students in all age groups expressed strong emotions about parents leaving for dangerous assignments.
- Adolescents are distressed that parents deal with family members as they deal with their military subordinates.

Perceptions of Life On Installation

- Adolescents feel very safe on-installation. This statement was related consistently across age groups.
- The older group feels that there is little offered on-installation. Their impression is that the youth centers are established for younger children. The younger groups like the centers and activities offered on-installation; however, they too would like more facilities and more activity choices.
- There are concerns about the poor condition of the housing on many installations and that repairs are not made in a timely manner.

Perceptions of Life Off Installation

- There is the strong feeling among respondents of not always feeling safe in off-installation school environments.
- Many respondents seemed very conscious of formal gangs as a threat to their safety, although this appeared to depend on the installation's location.
- When youths attend events off installation, they perceive a need to be more conscious of how they act and dress.

Relationship with Peers

- Discussions often centered on peer issues. Almost all groups talked about the difficulty of starting up new friendships after a move.
- Younger adolescents, in particular, related a great deal of difficulty in making new friends.
- The older groups were not as concerned about this issue; in fact, many looked forward to making new friends after each move.

Summary of Group Differences

Service, pay group, gender, and race differences were not apparent in the focus group data. Installation location (stateside and overseas) and age group differences seemed to be critical issues.

Location Differences

- Youths living overseas reported more moves, a greater sense of safety in their place of residence, and a higher degree of concern about moving to an installation with more violence and higher crime than those adolescents living stateside.
- Adolescents living stateside mentioned problems with feelings of safety, involvement with gangs, and educational difficulties depending on where the installation was located; for example, if adolescents lived on installations near large metropolitan areas, then these problems were more pronounced.

Age Group Differences

- While elementary schools overseas were perceived as inferior to domestic schools, middle and high schools overseas were perceived as superior to domestic schools.
- On the whole, all group participants were generally happy with their situations, appreciated at least some of the benefits of military life, and encountered problems more frequently off-installation than on-installation.

Recommendations

The issue of transition between schools seems to be a serious, justified concern on the part of many respondents. This school problem might be addressed by organizing a more active academic counseling service on installation for school-age children.

Although it can be concluded that students do adjust to new surroundings after they move, still there is considerable concern about moving and an initial adjustment period. It is reasonable to consider more support for adolescents both just before and just after they move. Information sessions about the new locale might be provided with films or written material or by other youngsters who have lived there previously.

Many of the adolescents' concerns about moving seemed centered around missing old friends and meeting new friends. Some attention could be given to easing the transition from one social group to another. Adolescents' peer relations should be facilitated to whatever extent possible. The youth centers might serve as places for adolescents to meet future companions by establishing a computer center with e-mail and training sessions for its use, and peers with whom they might begin to communicate.

More effort might be made to address the desire by many older youth to develop centers or activities on installation more suited to their interests and age group. Implicit in this wish is the strong feeling that the respondents feel very safe on installation, often while a violent life swirls right outside the gates of their installation. They look for things to do on installation, but generally feel that the efforts and facilities are more suited to younger children.

Deployment of parents of military adolescents to dangerous assignments is a fact of military life that cannot be changed, but it might be possible to provide additional support for the adolescents in this distressful situation. The level of direct services available to adolescents during parental deployments should be increased.

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Introduction

Researchers from the Military Family Institute (MFI) of Marywood University traveled to military installations in the continental United States as well as Hawaii, Europe, and Asia to administer the Armed Services Adolescent Survey to young people between the ages of 10 and 18 whose parent(s) are active duty military members (Jeffreys et al., 1997).

The purpose of the interviews was to give the young people an opportunity to express their opinions in a less structured way than they were able to do in the questionnaire. With this method of collecting data, it was felt that perhaps additional information could be collected about what life is like in the military for adolescents. Results from the questionnaire were expected to be significant and substantial. However, focus group data, undergoing qualitative analysis, might substantiate and highlight results obtained from questionnaire data analysis. In the end, it was intended that the more personal impressions obtained in focus groups would provide a different lens by which to view the military adolescent experience.

Methodology

All participants were asked to consider taking part in a thirty to forty-five minute audio taped focus group with others in their age group (10-12; 13-14; 15-18) following completion of the questionnaire. Adolescents were asked to check the space provided on the consent/assent form if they agreed to participate (participation in the focus group was not mandatory to completing the questionnaire). Parents were told they would be informed prior to the administration if their child was chosen for the focus group.

A list of participants, by age group, for each of the questionnaire administration periods was generated to determine which session had the largest number of participants in each age group. Examination of this list determined which administration periods would be followed by a focus group. The focus groups were scheduled on the day with the greatest number of participants in each age group. The parent or adolescent was telephoned to confirm their availability for participation in the focus group.

After the young people completed the questionnaires, they were divided by age for the interview sessions. The groups were as follows: 10-12 year olds (youngest group), 13-14 year olds (middle group), and 15-18 year olds (oldest group). The age division was implemented because it seemed that the

adolescents would be more forthcoming in their remarks when they were with others of their age. Participation in the interview sessions was voluntary. Generally, each focus group contained 4-10 adolescents including one or two interviewers trained to facilitate discussion among members of the group. With some rare exceptions, generally the focus groups contained an equal number of boys and girls.

Fifty-two focus groups were conducted during data collection for the adolescent project between September 1995 and May 1996. Groups were held at 17 sites in the continental United States (CONUS), including Hawaii and four sites outside the continental United States (OCONUS). Air Force bases accounted for 16 of the groups, Army posts 14, Naval bases 12, and Marine Corps bases 10. CONUS sites hosted 45 of the groups and OCONUS sites 7. There were 17 discussion groups with 10-12 year olds, 17 with 13-14 year olds, and 18 with 15-18 year olds. Group size ranged from 1 (one group had only one attendee) to 18, with a mean of slightly over 7 per group. Females accounted for 191 of the participants and males accounted for 177 of the total. Gender information of participants was not extracted from two of the groups recordings due to technical problems with the recording equipment. Thus, the gender of the 15 participants in these two groups is unknown.

The questions addressed (see Appendix A) ranged from the very general, such as "what is life like for you?" to specific questions about such topics as moving and growing up on military installations. The facilitators were given some latitude to explore issues raised by the participants. Focus group sessions were audio taped.

These audio tapes were transcribed at the Military Family Institute. An examination of the interviews revealed that while the interviewers used a script as a guideline, they did not just read the questions word-by-word and ask the adolescents to respond. In fact, the sessions might be characterized as discussion groups where the participants responded to each other as well as the interviewer and were often quite vehement in the way they expressed their opinions.

Two qualitative researchers then analyzed the data in slightly different ways. In one case, the data were read and recorded on index cards by the researcher. Each response by each person interviewed was recorded verbatim. Each of the cards was assigned a code. The codes were based on the questions that the interviewers asked the adolescents.¹ Coded topics were as follows: after-school activities, school, life in a military family, moving, and safety. The cards were

¹ It should be noted that interviewers were trained to only explicitly ask questions which were not spontaneously addressed by the discussion group participants.

then collated so that all of the cards with the same code were grouped together. Next, the cards were categorized according to the similarity of the information found on them. For example, numerous students referred to some initial adjustment period when they moved, but then added that they enjoyed meeting new people and moving to new places. Cards that reflected that concept were grouped together (Lincoln & Goober, 1985).

In the other case, all the transcribed data was read and then the data was entered into a computerized database (Turner & Handler, 1992) exactly as transcribed. The computerized database enabled the researcher to look at the data in a variety of ways depending on the criteria established at the time. Once all the data had been entered, the information was organized in a number of ways. Key words were identified. For example, the use of the word "gangs" was mentioned 21 times in focus group interviews. This computer program, however, went a step further. Data "chunks" were coded by the date of entry, focus group identification, and general categories identified by the researcher. The data were then collected on computerized topic cards. Once initial topic cards had been created, new topic cards could be generated based on the initial topic card data set.

Qualitative researchers have noted that data collection, reduction, display, and analysis are not separate processes but concurrent and interdependent (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Further, data reduction involves a cycle of coding and analysis which can be traced to the original context in which the data were written (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Wellman & Sim, 1990).

In order to enhance the validity of the process, the discussions between the two researchers further reduced the data and confirmed the impressions each had independently reached. As it turned out, the analysis of the interviews indicated that the adolescents' responses could be divided into four categories. The categories and subtopic(s) within each are presented in the following table.

Table 1
Categories and Subtopics in Focus Group Data

Attitudes Toward Moving

Curriculum and other school issues
Peer relationships
Encountering new experiences
General concerns about the process of moving

Parental Relationships

Deployment and family life

Perceptions of Life On Installation

Safety
Recreation
Housing

Perceptions of Life Off Installation

Safety

Each of the four main categories will be discussed separately and will include the references to the adolescents' comments to support the inferences that are made as well as comments on the general feelings of the different age groups where those differences exist.

Throughout this report identifying information for the quotations will be presented as follows: military services will be identified by the following abbreviations: Army - USA; Air Force - USAF; Marine Corps - USMC; and Navy - USN, the gender of the adolescent who made the comment, and the numeric range which represents the age group for the group. For example, (USA, Male, 15-18) would denote a comment from a male who was participating in a group of 15 to 18 year olds at an Army post. Where a location, such as Germany, is presented, rather than a service abbreviation the group consisted of participants whose parents were members of more than one service. Any information missing from the parentheses after a quote could not be discerned from the recording of the group. For example, there were some respondents who could not be heard clearly enough at times to be able to identify them by gender.

Results

Attitudes Toward Moving

Comments ran the gamut from "It sucks!" to "It's not too bad" (USAF, 13-15). Generally, their comments about moving would first focus on negative aspects and then would quickly focus on the positive. They seemed to feel a sense of loss, but yet looked forward to new relationships and experiences. They appeared to be most anxious about having to move suddenly and also often mentioned that their friends seemed to "disappear" overnight when the friends had to move suddenly. They were concerned about their possessions being lost or broken.

Conclusion 1: All groups expressed remorse about leaving old friends. All groups expressed excitement about meeting new friends.

Discussions about moving inevitably turned to issues related to friendships. Therefore, relationships with peers seemed to be of utmost importance to military adolescents. They expressed distress at moving away from friends. Yet, usually, they immediately expressed the desirability of making new friends.

Yes. I've had to move quite a bit; but it does affect me sometimes and I don't like to leave my friends. But I like to make new friends.

(USAF, Female, 13-14)

It's especially hard when you get some friends that you feel you're going to be with all your life, that you feel are really special friends and you have to move from them.

(USAF, Female, 10-12)

But, I make new friends in a new place.

(USAF, Male, 10-12)

They tried to retain friendships by writing and telephoning when they were allowed to and were delighted when someone whom they had known at another installation moved nearby.

Well, I've had at least one or two best friends in past places, but I always—when I come somewhere new I always—make at least one new best friend. And I always stay in touch with them. I always write them letters or call them.

(USAF, Female, 13-14)

They often mentioned how important it was when moving to a new place to make a new circle of friends, in addition to just a special friend or two. Belonging to a group at a new school seemed most important to them.

It's, like, important to have a bunch of friends not like a gang or anything, just some friends to do things with.

(USMC, Male, 15-18)

Many adolescents expressed the idea that if “things were not going well” socially, they might “go better” at a new school.

But, in one place that I went to, I didn't have any friends at all, so I was glad to move overseas.

(USAF, Male, 13-14)

Sometimes moving is good, you know, if you, like, you just can't handle it where you are and things like that, but the bad part is when you finally meet all your friends and get really close to them, then, you move again. It's just having to start all over.

(USN, Male, 15-18)

Conclusion #2: Older students are concerned about the lack of uniformity between school curricula and programs.

One of the major concerns expressed by the adolescents, especially the oldest and middle groups, was that there would be differences in the quality of the schools and where they stood in terms of their high school curriculum as they moved from place to place. Many of their concerns revolved around the issues of Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and college placement. There were strong feelings expressed that they were deeply worried about these issues, viewing them as pivotal to the course of their lives after leaving high school. At times,

the adolescents stated that they would be far ahead of others at a new school and other times would not have adequate prerequisite knowledge to fully benefit from the educational experiences at the new school. The youngest students expressed few concerns in these areas, perhaps because they were not yet focused on attending college or adult employment opportunities.

Interviewer: What do you guys think in terms of being in DoD's schools, and then the next place. Do you think you're going to be ahead or behind?

Many: Behind!

(Germany, 13-14)

I worry about having the right credits and getting good SAT's so I can get into college. People get sports scholarships. Some DoD schools don't have much of a sports program.

(USAF, Male, 15-18)

You were way ahead over there. You come here and you're like, oh, cause you've learned that stuff.

(USMC, Female, 13-14)

It's very hard to move in high school if you start off first with academics. . . They want something different, you have to have something different just to graduate, you have to have every honors program, the honors program are weighted differently, you go to different schools, everything gets thrown up in the air, you're at the mercy of your guidance counselor to fight for your grade point average.

(USN, Female, 15-18)

There seemed to be a prevailing attitude that the elementary schools abroad (installation schools) were not as good as the schools domestically.

Overseas the school where I went were not very good. I don't think the military really supported them very much, because they weren't very good at all, they didn't teach me much of anything.

(USAF, Male, 13-14)

One reason stated was:

All the poorer teachers who can't get a job in the U.S. have to come here to work.

(USN, 13-14)

However, older students tended to view the overseas schools as significantly superior to their public counterparts in the states.

We went to school overseas. We lived in Okinawa for three years and that was run by DoDDs, that was nice. The schools were a lot better than public schools are here. I liked it a lot.

(USMC, Male, 15-18)

Often students looked on the move as an opportunity to go to a "better school" if they were currently dissatisfied with their schools.

Conclusion #3: All groups expressed enthusiasm about new experiences, such as meeting new people, making new friends, exploring new places. Reasons are complex and diverse with respect to why students look forward to moving.

In addition to mentioning that moving could be an opportunity to make new friends or attend a better school, respondents often expressed a desire to "see new places." They discussed the fact that moving had given them the opportunity to become familiar with different cultures and to have many enriching experiences that adolescents in the civilian population would not usually have. In addition to moving to new places, they also appreciated the opportunity to travel from the various installations with school groups for field trips and with sports teams. For example, they mentioned going to the Louvre as a part of a field trip and also to Rome. Many remarked how often they were able to relate their extensive travel experiences to their understanding of cultures that were a part of their curriculum.

We get to see other places that other people don't get to see.

(Germany, Male, 13-14)

The youngest group complained that they did not have as many opportunities for some off-the-installation travel experiences as the older groups.

Like well, the older kids get to, ok, go to Italy to play soccer. We never go!
(Spain, Male, 10-12)

Interviewer: OK. What about being in a military family? What specifically about that do you think might be different?

It's great! You get to see different parts of the world.

(USAF, Male, 13-14)

Learning languages are fun. I like to do that.

(USA, Female, 10-12)

You see the world and the different places in it. You get to make new friends and see new places.

(USA, Male, 10-12)

Learning other countries' activities and, like, in Germany, soccer is the best sport over there and in Jordan, dancing and all the different kind of foods and stuff. Religion is really neat.

(USA, Female, 10-12)

In general, the adolescents saw moving as a way of life and many said that when they were in a place for a few years they were ready to move. Although they missed old friends and were reluctant to leave "people that we love," they often saw moving as a "chance for a new start," a way to have new experiences, and to absorb new cultures.

Parental Relationships

Participants clearly had concerns about military life, specifically, about deployment and parenting issues.

Conclusion #1: Students in all age groups expressed strong emotions about parents leaving for dangerous assignments.

Respondents expressed strong feelings about their parents being deployed and about how their lives were different from adolescents of families in the civilian population. Their comments provided insight into the closeness of their relationships with their parents. As might be expected, the youngsters expressed great distress when their parents were deployed to dangerous areas, as is often the case with deployment. Comments ranged from "I miss my mom," to "I'm afraid he'll die."

Interviewer: Is it hard for you, when a parent is away?

It's scary, because, like, you have to worry about them, if they have to go to war or something. You never know what could happen to them.

(USA, Female, 13-14)

Older boys worried about having someone with whom to discuss problems. Adolescents in the youngest group seemed to express emotional responses most often. Adolescents in the older and middle groups told of their increase in responsibility when their fathers were away. The boys, in particular, said that they were often expected to take on adult roles when their fathers were away.

It wouldn't bother me because my dad is in Intelligence. He'll never have to go to the front lines fighting, but he'll be away, and I'll probably miss him, you know, from him doing chores around the house.

(USA, Male, 13-14)

Interviewer: Do you have more responsibility when your father is gone?

Being the oldest in the family sort of puts you, I have a sister and I am the oldest out of us two so it kind of puts me in . . . she's not doing well in school and my mom doesn't get home until 6:00 at night and it sort of puts me in charge of her.

(USAF, Female, 13-14)

The adolescents discussed the differences that existed in their homes when their fathers were deployed. They said that things were more "relaxed" and that there was generally less structure, i.e., they reported less attention to a routine or schedule and that they went to restaurants more often. They also discussed the difficulty that the family had adjusting when their fathers returned. Reasons cited were that they had "gotten used to" going to their mothers for any kind of permission, and when their fathers returned had difficulty seeing them as authority figures.

Conclusion #2: They are distressed that parents deal with family members as they deal with their military subordinates.

Many of the adolescents reported that their parents, particularly their fathers, were stricter than civilian fathers. In some cases, the respondents viewed

these parents as "mean" but more often say the strictness and structure as an expression of caring. Many remarked that their fathers treated them the way that they treated people of a lower rank, such as yelling and issuing orders and that this carry-over "was not right for fathers to use at home." They also frequently mentioned that their parents were overachievers and expected the same of them.

It's, like, every time she gets up one more level, she gets stricter. And so she wanted to get "Chief" and I'm, like, don't want her to go to chief because she's going to be so harder then. I mean she can be nice and, you know, it's like bang! She'd be just walking around everywhere and she's like God. I mean I want her to make chief because it's more money and everything, but. . . man.

(USN, Female, 15-18)

Yeah, especially, the higher up they get. Cause my dad's a lieutenant now and it's hard to put up with him. He gets so frustrated with things at work and stuff.

(USN, Male, 15-18)

You know, we just move around more and our lives are just a bit more strict, because our parents are in the military and are the type of person who believes in you know, discipline. And they are kinda down your throat most of the time, cause my dad was a drill instructor and, you know, his favorite thing to do was yell when he gets mad.

(USA, Male, 15-18)

Perceptions of Life On Installation

Comments focused on safety issues, opportunities for recreation, and concerns about housing.

Conclusion 1: Adolescents feel very safe on installation. This statement was related consistently across age groups.

Besides the universal issues associated with moving, perhaps the issue of on-installation safety was most pronounced by those living or going to school on installation. Issues surrounding safety are currently on top of the list for many parents in all schools. However, safety is not something many adolescents overtly value, especially in front of peers. This feeling of safety was not always appreciated by the respondents, and only grudgingly did they admit that there was a strong feeling of safety.

As boring as school is, nothing ever happens. (USMC, Male, 15-18)

Interviewer: But, do you feel safe?

Yeah (USMC, Female, 15-18)

Yes, I feel very safe. (USMC, Male, 15-18)

Yes. (USMC, Male, 15-18)

Interviewer: So, you feel safe here on the base. Right?

I guess living on base is kind of nice because you have a less crime rate, I mean, you can walk down the street, you can go wherever you want and you didn't have any fear, you know, of anything happening, whereas, now, it's like, oh my god, don't go out of the house, it's not that bad, but . . .

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

Others felt that the feeling of safety was almost repressive, although they did appreciate that they were able to walk the streets at night. Many associated a safe environment with "having nothing to do." Many expressed disappointment that more of their off-installation friends refused to go on the installation because "nothing ever happened there."

Around where I live, you don't mess around there cause that's where the colonels live and the generals and the high ranks; that's where you always have to carry your I.D. card or they'll come out and get you; so, I mean, it's pretty safe around where I live.

(USMC, Female, 13-14)

This feeling of safety was often mentioned as a contrast to what existed right outside the gates of the installation. As might be expected, this feeling was dependent upon the location of the installation since some installations were located relatively close to urban environments while others were more remote.

It's pretty nice when you like go somewhere else and we went to Washington D.C. and it's like, you know, crime everywhere and you have to worry about everything and then you go onto base and you just feel so secure cause you know. . .

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

I feel safe on base too.

(USN, Male, 13-14)

Interviewer: OK. How about if you have experiences when you go off-base. Not just on base, but off base, too.

Well, sometimes when I go off-base and I go to the train, there's this really bad train station that's got all these bums and stuff, and they'd always be walking up to you asking for stuff, and you don't know what could happen.

(USN, Male, 13-14)

I feel really safe on base. It's just some people might come out.

(USN, Male 13-14)

On some installations, the feeling of safety was marginal since the respondents perceived dangerous neighborhoods right outside their gates. Unlike the previous comments, which were based on experiences at other installations, these individuals, relatively close to perceived dangerous neighborhoods, felt threatened.

In my neighborhood you don't feel that safe because I live on the edge of post so it is right next to (a place) which is really violent. And like there are a little bit of woods so everybody from (this place) just waits in between the woods between (our base).

(USA, Female, 10-12)

In some situations, the respondents were more willing to talk about being safe in a far more positive light. They could walk around the installation freely, go to local stores, meet friends, and generally encounter a very predictable, friendly environment. This security was highly valued, and many adolescents were conscious that this was a function of the installation environment.

Well, just being on base though, the BX and all that kind of stuff is you know everything is right there, you just, you know, walk down the road. Cause you know, too, we would just walk down the road and go get ice cream or something. Cause everything is right here on base.

(USA, Female, 15-18)

I like living in a military family, because I do like to move, and I do like that if you are on base, you know that you're safe and secure, and ... I just like that safe, secure feeling on, if I do ever come on base.

(USAF, Female, 13-14)

Others talked about the feeling of safety in a different way. Outside the installation they often had to contend with gangs and other groups who were threatening. Some who lived off installation felt they had no choice but to join gangs in order to have a small sense of security. Yet on the installation, formal gangs simply did not exist. There were small groups of like-minded students who supported each other, or there was the sense that neighborhoods often banded together in mutual support. But the complex world of organized gangs was a problem rarely encountered on the installation, and this was a relief to many respondents.

Well I think that gangs do exist on post, but you know, like, you can be in a gang on post, but I mean, we have, I know a group of kids that are a large group. People consider them a gang, but they're just a bunch of kids—about 20 kids. And they hang out at a park. So, MPs think they're all gang members and stuff like that, because they always wear, they like red and black.
(USA, Male, 10-12)

Interviewer: OK. Are there ever problems with gangs at this installation?

It's it's it's not really gangs, it's mostly neighborhoods sticking together, saying they're a gang. (Others agree) (USA, Male, 15-18)

Interviewer: OK.

And they won't, I mean, they don't fight, they just jump people. If you look at one of the people the wrong way or something, they're gonna like "you saying something, fool?"
(USA, Male, 15-18)

Conclusion #2: The older group feels that there is little offered on installation. Their impression is that the youth centers are established for younger children. The younger groups like the centers and activities offered on-installation; however, they too would like more facilities and more activity choices.

A strong claim might be made that any adolescent group anywhere would feel there is little offered in their community. There could be boys and girls clubs right down the street and many would claim that they do not run activities suited to their unique interests. However, since so many respondents had moved so often and had lived on different installations, many had positive memories of what was offered elsewhere and were disappointed that similar opportunities were not available in their present environment.

Interviewer: O.K., I want to just ask about programs here on base for kids your age? Are there any?

(Everyone laughs)

There aren't any on base. At my other base, they had this one place, I forgot what it was called, it was called like, fun station or something. But, it was like, one part was a gym and one part was like a snack bar and the other place was nothing but arcades, I mean you know, like, good ones, that they knew kids would like. And, you could just go there and hang there, I mean, you could just sit there the whole day and not do anything but you would still have fun.

(USMC, Male, 13-14)

Well, I used to live at (name of base) and they had the schools on base, and so, it's a lot different here, because everybody was military and there was always different people coming in, so. . . I liked it a lot better there, so like, there was more discipline, more stuff to do.

(USMC, Female, 13-14)

What was the question, what we do for fun? Well, out in Arizona, our theater was great, on the base and, that's where everyone went; right around 6:30 or 7:00 everyone went to the theater. Depending on what kind of movie it was.

(USMC, Female, 15-18)

Older respondents, however, had stronger feelings that the opportunities for recreation offered on installation were not suitable for them. They did not deny that there were indeed "things to do."

Anybody can go to the gym, they have no dances, they have no activities for us to do, they have nothing at all.

(USA, Female, 15-18)

That's all you can do is go to the pool or go to the gym or go to bowl. And, you can barely bowl if you go there at nighttime. Cause all the lanes is taken up. So, all you do is sit around and look at each other like you all crazy. And maybe, have a cigarette.

(USMC, Male, 15-18)

Yet according to many older respondents, these activities were not for them.

Yeah, but that is for mostly little kids. And it is not something you want to go to. Because there are a lot of teenagers around here that like to dance and stuff. They need to open things like that for just the older people. You don't see 17 and 18 year olds want to come around with 5 and 6 year olds and it is just because (interrupted).

(USMC, Female, 15-18)

The older respondents were full of recommendations, some simple, and some more complex.

I would like to see certain things that just kids our age could go to, you know, no adults there; I mean, adults supervising, it would be like a certain age group like 10-17 or something like that and you could go in there and play basketball or do volleyball.

(USMC, Male, 13-14)

Well, it would have more stuff that caters to teenagers, rather than little 6 year olds and we want to have a numerous amount of video games, of course, a snack bar, and a lot of games that don't require tokens, like table top.

(USMC, Male, 13-14)

Maybe they should get high schools on the bases. That would help a lot. I mean, they have elementary schools on most bases.

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

Conclusion #3: There are concerns about the poor condition of the housing on many installations and that repairs are not made in a timely manner.

Housing was not a major issue for many respondents. However, there was a strong perception among a number of respondents at different installations that the housing was not properly maintained. The respondents felt that their housing maintenance was not always a high priority to the command, and they were often ignored.

The houses. They don't think about how big peoples families are because we live in a four bedroom house and we're trying to fit ten people in there, and 11 on the way; it is hard, I mean we are cramped in there. There is not enough room.

(USMC, Female, 13-14)

When we were moving at Staff K-Port, before we moved, we went for like a whole year, we had, like, water damage in the house and you could see where the crack and the water and the roof was badly damaged and we couldn't get up there and clean the stuff off because we were afraid we would fall through the roof. It was real soggy and stuff and you couldn't do anything with it. And, they just don't respond to your calls.

(USMC, Male, 13-14)

No, they don't. I live in the Staff townhouses every week we have to call Maintenance for something, like 10 times our toilet has overflowed, and like, last month, the water from, our water it was, like, seeping through the walls, dripping down the walls. You call people and they come, they have to go in my room, which is on the second floor and they make like this huge hole in my floor and a huge hole in the ceiling so you can see from upstairs all the way downstairs and they, they left it there! And they said, we're going to come back tomorrow and they didn't come back for, like, three weeks.

(USA, Female, 13-14)

...and when we got here it was just like. . .

(USA, Female, 13-14)

Interviewer: What? What's different? What's different about it?

Well to keep up, like, the (missing word), when we first got here, there was like a bunch of old buildings standing around. We thought then they were falling apart. (missing words)

(USA, Female, 13-14)

Perceptions of Life Off Installation

Strong concerns were expressed about safety issues and the presence and activities of gangs.

Conclusion #1: There is the strong feeling among respondents of not always feeling safe in off-installation school environments. Many respondents seemed very conscious of formal gangs as a threat to their safety, although this appeared to be dependent on the location of the installation. When youths attend events off installation, they perceive a need to be more conscious of how one acts and dresses.

Those that lived off installation often talked about living in very dangerous neighborhoods, in contrast to those who consistently talked about the safe feeling on installation.

... gots the neighborhood, fights going on, and stuff like that.

(USA, Male, 15-18)

Yeah.

(USA, Male, 15-18)

Once nighttime hits and the (garbled) all you hear from my neighborhood and the neighborhood across is gunshot hour. You're gonna hear that all night.

(USA, Male, 15-18)

Other discussions reflected the expected anxieties of attending a new school. Respondents often felt anxious about "moving up the grades," as simple fights became more violent and deadly. Often, these anxieties were based on hearsay.

My fear is going into the high school cause my friends that are in the high school said this boy said that he was going to go into the bathroom and a bunch of gang members pulled him into the bathroom and beat him up just for going into their bathroom. Supposedly is what they said, so, I'm just afraid to even just go into the high school next year.

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

We were playing basketball in the gym right before football practice one day and this boy shot up and the other boy went to block him and hit the ball and it bounced back and smacked him in the face. And, when he went in the locker room to change, the boy just started kicking the kid and just beat him up pretty bad, there was blood all over the floor of the locker room.

(USMC, Male, 13-14)

Most discussions of life off installation, however, centered on the activities of formal gangs. Many were very anxious about joining gangs. They were worried about wearing the wrong clothes, which might send incorrect cues to certain gang members.

Pressure about joining gangs. Go up and go in that gang as soon as I turned the right age that they'll let you in. And, there have been times where maybe I'd had a bad day or something and I really wanted to get in that gang and other days where I just really didn't want to because it just didn't seem like the right thing to do. But, it's been off and on like that. I guess it's better not to do something like that; I don't want to get in any trouble or anything.

(USAF, Male, 13-14)

It isn't that I'm afraid of gangs. It's, like, if you don't know what the gangs' colors are, you have no idea what colors not to wear, because like with most gangs, if you wear one of their colors, or even just a teeny speck of one of their colors, they'll kill you or they'll beat you up real bad, or . . .

(USA, Female, 10-12)

Interviewer: Do you know anybody who that's happened to?

Yeah.

(USA, Male, 10-12)

No, but I've heard tons of stories about it, and, like, especially around here in this area, because we're right between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Like two really bad crime spots, and so I'm usually pretty worried because we're, like, pretty much in the center, (missing word) lot of crime around here. So I'm always worried, like, if somebody's going to beat me up or kill me just because I'm wearing the wrong kind of shoelaces or something.

(USA, Female, 10-12)

Others were more reflective about joining a gang. They found a strong, attractive sense of belonging in gangs. Some referred to gangs as simply an extended family.

Well, I think the main thing is at least that gatherdness that brings people. There's problems at home I think with a lot of kids. That's what gangs basically are is, like, a family. So, if their having trouble at home, maybe they might attempt or ask to be in a gang.

(USA, Male, 13-14)

If you're in a gang you don't think about telling a teacher, I mean, say you didn't have anybody to back you up and you got beat down then you go tell a teacher, but if your in a gang, like, I'll just go tell them and they'll come in there and beat the crap out of them just because they've got my back. And, there's been times where people will grab other people and they'll hold their legs and their feet and stuff and just let the other person go into them and just hit them and punch them in the face.

(USMC, Male, 13-14)

Interviewer: O.K. Are there people that, well, those people that bothered you, were they off post?

Yes. A gang called MI. A Philippine gang. I'm in 2 different gangs. At home I joined a gang called ESC (East Side Crypts) and I've been in that since I was 9 years old. Here I joined ATP, It's not really a gang they call it a click. It's not really all that bad. If something went down, you'd have someone to have your back.

(USN, Male, 10-12)

Formal gangs were a way of life; an accepted part of existence, and the violence, which accompanied gang life, was discussed almost casually.

Most of my friends are gang members and I go out with them all the time. I hang around Mexicans and there are Blacks. It is mostly the Mexicans and the Blacks that fight all the time.

(USMC, Female, 15-18)

Interviewer: With each other?

Yeah, constantly. We have had stabbings, people have stabbed people. I remember the other day someone drove up and shot up someone's house. There is a lot of things, a lot of us, a lot of people get arrested over just I guess a lot of it is the way we dress, the way we look. Even if you are not doing anything, if you are walking down the street and you are with known gang members, they treat you differently. We got pulled over and they slammed our faces in the car, the police officers did, they could not prove anything they just wanted to search us.

(USMC, Female, 15-18)

Still, when the conversation turned to gangs, many in the oldest group felt that although gangs were a part of life, they could be avoided.

I don't know, I go to school with a lot of, you know, it's just like the crowd you hang out with, and I hear about it all the time, so... And then, you know what parties you don't go to, where the drinking is going to be at, and who does it a lot and stuff. But, that just kind of serves to help you avoid it. And, my boyfriend used to be really heavy into drugs, but he quit. . . It's just, it's who you choose to hang out with.

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

Conclusions

Service Differences

Differences between respondents across services were not apparent. What seemed to be far more important was the issue of where the installation was located. The outside environment, including neighborhoods and schools, influenced whether respondents were more conscious, for example, of gangs.

Overseas/Stateside Installation Distinctions

The respondents had very strong feelings about the differences between the installation opportunities in the States versus overseas. With very few exceptions, most seemed to sincerely enjoy life overseas, especially if they lived on installation. Those that did not often related experiencing difficulties.

Well, I have moved to Germany and it is very hard to live over there because I did not live on base; I lived around the Germans and you cannot understand a word they say. Not anything they say.

(USAF, Female, 10-12)

Yet most found the overseas experience exhilarating.

But I really liked Okinawa—the whole community—I loved it. I loved, there was so much for people to do, the beaches, they had teen clubs at night and stuff and they had all this stuff, it was so fun. Everybody, all the kids got along. There were fights every now and then, but it was just beautiful. They had transportation to every single base, you could go to any island—it was perfect.

(USMC, Female, 15-18)

Iceland was beautiful. The people are great. And they are real trusting, like I said, there's no crime; they actually have computer stores that will actually put a game in the computer and just have them sitting out there and just trust people. . .

(USMC, Male, 15-18)

In addition while in the oldest group, many who had lived overseas perceived the schools to be more advanced than their counterparts in the States, those in the middle group had a mixed view of the overseas schools.

You were way ahead over there. You come here and you're like, oh, cause you've learned that stuff and they're teaching it over. You're way ahead in Japan. And, here, it's like you're really far behind and you should be up higher.

(USMC, Female, 13-14)

They also have a lot more learning materials, like back in Okinawa they had four computers in every single classroom. Over here there's about 20 computers in the computer lab and occasionally, a computer per classroom. But, most of the time, there's not even enough computers for everyone when you go in there. So there's a lot better materials in government-funded schools.

(USMC, Male, 13-14)

You do get that more one on one attention. It's really small. The teachers, they seem to care for the most part, and uhm, they really don't tolerate goofing off or nothing. It almost feels like when I used to be in Okinawa. The schools there are more advanced. That's the thing I like about being in DoDDs overseas. They're just more advanced. But here, it's o.k., but, I don't like the school that much. You can get a lot from it, but it's not for me.

(USMC, Female, 15-18)

We have a girl just moved in from Okinawa and she's really ahead, like, in the foreign language, she's, like, gone. She's on French like 5 or something. Her sophomore year, so, and in the rest of her studies, she's really ahead too.

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

When they were asked to identify problems on these overseas installations, the problems almost sounded trivial compared to the issues discussed in the state side installations.

Interviewer -- What could DoD do to make life better for you?

They could make more for junior high. The high school has their own.

(Spain, Female, 13-14)

Yeah, junior high is not allowed to go out. When the drama club went on this trip, seventh and eighth graders were allowed to be in the drama club and do the plays here. But when they went to do plays outside, the seventh and eighth graders were not allowed to go. Last year, it was allowed that the 7th and 8th grades could go to England to do the JP project in science. But this year we're not allowed to go on that field trip because it's out of the country. There's been some cut in funds for the junior high.

(Spain, Female, 13-14)

The strong sense of regret, for leaving the foreign installations, often ended up as anxiety about what existed in the States.

It's a lot safer on base. Well, safer in Spain in general. I would rather be here, be somewhere in Virginia, where I know somebody could turn on me and shoot me.
(Spain, Female, 15-18)

I did. I did a lot. But I thought it was my attitude because where I came from in Okinawa, everybody is so friendly and when I came here I was just so mad because people were so hateful and this and that and I was getting into a fight every week. I was getting jumped by like five and six different girls. I was, like, and I still had the mouth, I was, like, yelling back, I did not even care, I was, like, whatever. After a while I just dropped out of school because I got tired of it.

(USMC, Female, 15-18)

Limitations of the Study

As in many qualitative studies, one must be cautious when formulating general conclusions from these focus group interviews. Every effort was made to conduct each focus group in a similar way. The interviewer was given latitude, depending on the "swing" of the conversation, but almost always adhered to a strict protocol. Still, several unique conditions should be noted.

All adolescent participants in the focus groups were volunteers, and thus a self-selected group. Despite this, there still was a wide range of opinions on many issues.

It also must be remembered that the adolescent participants were often very self-conscious about what was said and who would report on this. Participants were not always familiar with each other. Not only were they openly responding to difficult questions from the interviewers, they were also very conscious of how their answers would be perceived by the other participants. As with any adolescent group, many respondents often appeared to give answers aimed at impressing their peers. Despite the difficulty of pulling together a group such as this, developing group rapport quickly, and tackling some very tough issues, the responses generally seemed honest and detailed.

Most groups were heterogeneous with respect to socioeconomic status and living situation. There were officer children, staff children, children who lived on installation, children who lived off installation, children who were in the

military "before birth," and those who had parents who recently entered the service. Likewise there were obviously "good" students, and in some cases, dropouts. This diversity led to interesting discussions, but also created difficulties when attempting to identify general trends.

Finally, the difference in age groups, from age 11 up to 18, made for very different response patterns, as might be expected with any adolescent group. The older groups were reflective, insightful, and generally had the breadth of experience to give very detailed answers to the questions. They also seemed surer of themselves, and were willing to share more personal opinions. The younger groups tended to give very short, concise, sometimes cryptic answers, and no matter what the skill of the interviewer, many were unwilling to go beyond one syllable responses. In addition, the scripted questions sometimes led the discussion down a path which was not of major concern to the focus group. For example, the script required the facilitator to ask questions about gangs, yet in many cases, gangs were simply not a critical issue. Despite this not being a critical issue, many focus groups discussed gangs at length and might give the wrong impression that this is a major concern.

Despite these limitations, the skilled interviewers were able to accumulate an impressive data base which, when analyzed, reveals clear trends. Coupled with the survey data, these discussion groups represent an important contribution to understanding what adolescents think about life in the military.

Interviewers' Impressions

The questionnaire administration and the interviews took place, for the most part, in the military installation schools or, at times, in youth centers on the installations. When the setting for the interviews was in the schools, the interviewers reported that the adolescents seemed more formal and forthcoming than when the interviews occurred in the youth centers. A possible explanation for this reaction by the adolescents is that in the schools they behaved as they would in a classroom. Also, although at times the setting for the interviews in the youth centers were in quiet, private rooms, at other times they took place in rooms where other activities were occurring, such as bowling.

- *Teachers or principals sometimes came into the room when we were conducting the survey in a school, so the kids took it a lot more seriously under those circumstances.*
- *In the youth centers, they seemed to be used to playing so they occasionally were not as focused on the topics of discussion as we might have liked.*

The interviewers reported that the adolescents in general seemed relaxed during the interviews and seemed as if they felt free to express their ideas. However, they had the impression that different age groups had a tendency to respond in somewhat different ways. The oldest group seemed more serious and was willing to express their ideas. The middle group seemed to be interested in impressing each other, particularly the opposite gender. The youngest group seemed to feel comfortable, i.e., they often elaborated on their comments with personal stories and appeared to be the least self-conscious.

- ***The younger kids would often just go on and on about a friend who lived next door to them at a base they were at and they'd talk about things they liked to do and sometimes they'd say they met up with them again at another installation.***
- ***They seemed to just say what they felt or thought.***
- ***The middle group often seemed to be monitoring the reactions of others in the group to their responses and comments.***
- ***The older kids really seemed to really think about the issues, and often suggested solutions to the issues they raised as problems.***

The interviewers reported that the adolescents seemed to be "good kids," who were interested in "making a difference." The adolescents realized that any changes that resulted from their participation in the project would probably not have any effect on them but that it might have an effect on the next generation of adolescents.

- ***They really seemed to appreciate having the chance to talk about what life is like for them in a military family.***

Summary and General Recommendations

The focus group data, due to the reporting process, was analyzed only with respect to differences in age groups and location (stateside or overseas). The data reveals several general conclusions, which are summarized below: Based on the data, and what might reasonably be accomplished in a era of downsizing, general recommendations might be considered.

The issue of transition between schools seems to be a serious, justified concern on the part of many respondents. Comments such as these were typical of many.

I wish they had a Standard National Level for every grade because I went from I had taken the same science book three times: sixth, seventh and eighth grade because I moved each year.

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

I understand. I went from the best county in Florida to the best county in the Nation in Virginia and, the Virginia school system was so far behind and they kept on telling me that I was so stupid, and I'm like, look, you're wrong. I've already done all this, can't you just put me in a different class and they're like, oh no, you have to stay with the class, you're stupid, you're not supposed to know that yet and, it was just snobbish teachers.

(USAF, Female, 15-18)

One, one school system will require you to take, you know, economics your first year and the next one, your senior year, so you're like all messed up. You know, these seniors are in freshmen classes and vice versa. And, so it makes it really tough. They need to find like a universal school thing or something.

(USA, Female, 15-18)

That's one of the worst things that happened. Because you're like, in math you're doing fractions, and the next thing you know you go to a new school and you're still doing adding. (laughter among group members)

(USMC, Female, 10-12)

This is, of course, a universal problem for anyone moving often. Yet frequent relocation seems to be "normal procedure" for almost all students interviewed. Students must adjust to new environments and new subjects. Some are ahead, some behind in their studies. High school students are moving between schools, which incorporate different curriculum sequences.

RECOMMENDATION #1
ORGANIZE A MORE ACTIVE ACADEMIC COUNSELING SERVICE ON
INSTALLATION FOR SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN.

Many respondents expressed disappointment with the off-installation counselors. There was a strong perception that these counselors were not always sensitive to the unique concerns of military adolescents. The students seemed very willing to accept the inevitability that there would be numerous problems in adjusting to new schools. They were willing to accept that new friendships and personal challenges would emerge in any new environment. They were less willing to accept that the subjects studied would not be in synch.

Although it can be concluded that students do adjust to new surroundings after they move, still there is considerable concern about moving and an initial adjustment period.

RECOMMENDATION #2
IT IS REASONABLE TO CONSIDER MORE SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENTS
BOTH JUST BEFORE AND JUST AFTER THEY MOVE.

Since youngsters were concerned about their perception of short notice that they are sometimes given before moving, more attention could be given to informing military personnel at least several weeks before they are expected to move. Information sessions about the new locale might be provided with films or written material or by other youngsters who have recently moved for the proposed new locale.

Many of the adolescents' concerns about moving seemed centered around missing old friends and meeting new friends; some attention could be given to easing the transition from one social group to another.

RECOMMENDATION #3
ADOLESCENTS' PEER RELATIONS SHOULD BE FACILITATED TO
WHATEVER EXTENT POSSIBLE.

The youth centers might serve as places for adolescents to "meet" future companions by establishing a computer center with e-mail, training sessions in its use, and peers with whom they might begin to communicate. Such a system would also provide an opportunity to keep in contact with some of their friends from their former location.

Orientation sessions, which could be done by peers, would be a good way for adolescents to learn about their new homes and to make new acquaintances.

RECOMMENDATION #4
MORE EFFORT MIGHT BE MADE TO ADDRESS THE DESIRE BY MANY
OLDER YOUTH TO DEVELOP CENTERS OR ACTIVITIES ON-INSTALLATION
MORE SUITED TO THEIR INTERESTS AND AGE GROUP.

Implicit in this wish is the strong feeling that the respondents feel very safe on installation, often while a violent life swirls right outside the gates of their installation. They look for things to do on installation, but generally feel that the efforts and facilities are more suited to younger children.

However, it should be noted that the data suggests the respondents in the focus groups were generally content with their life in the military, as much as any adolescent can be content with their life. The older groups, especially, had strong feelings that being connected to the military was a "good thing." There were difficulties with moving so often, yet the older respondents seemed to accept this and started to appreciate how this often made them more self-reliant.

Not that I like leaving my friends or anything like that, I mean I hate leaving my friends, but I have been forced to know how to make new friends in a way by the military. Like, I am going to college next year and I am just not worried about it at all, like as far as the social aspect about it because I have done it so many times. Change of atmosphere.

(USAF, Male, 15-18)

In addition, at least with respect to these focus groups, there was a subtle pride in their parents, not always expressed in any adolescent age group anywhere.

I feel different because I think that uh, parents who are in the military are more committed to their job and they care more about their kids, how they grow up.

(USA, Female, 10-12)

Major concerns regarding parental relationships revolved around deployment of parents and parents treating family members as if they were their military subordinates.

RECOMMENDATION #5
**DEPLOYMENT OF PARENTS OF MILITARY ADOLESCENTS TO
DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENTS IS A FACT OF MILITARY LIFE THAT CANNOT
BE CHANGED, BUT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL
SUPPORT FOR THE ADOLESCENTS IN THIS DISTRESSFUL SITUATION.**

The level of direct services available to adolescents during parental deployments should be increased. Since boys seemed particularly worried about assuming adult roles when their fathers were away, perhaps some counseling for parents might be appropriate. Possibly, parents are not aware of the pressure that these circumstances place on children. Another related area of concern for boys is being deprived of the advice and support of absent fathers. Perhaps other male military personnel would be willing to provide that kind of support if an effort were organized and supervised by the military.

Because numerous youngsters stated that their parents treated them as if they were military subordinates, perhaps parenting classes could be sponsored by the military in order to sensitize military personnel to this concern and to suggest alternate and more appropriate ways of disciplining adolescents.

Future Research

One of the most striking and perhaps unexpected findings was the relatively quick adjustments that the adolescents made after they moved, as well as the often-expressed sentiment that they often looked forward to seeing new places and meeting new people. Future studies might explore the role that the experience of moving has in development of the quality of resilience, interpersonal skills, and coping skills. Another area that might be explored is whether or not there is a relationship between the number of moves, successful adaptation to the new installations, and frequency and adjustment to moving in adulthood.

Another interesting concept that emerged was the role that the relatively "closed" society on the installation might have had on the behavior of adolescents. It seemed that the strict rules and the emphasis on family culpability might have had a positive effect on adolescent behavior. Further studies in this area might provide direction for communities as they develop rules for adolescents and penalties for breaking those rules.

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Appendix A

Interview Script

The script that the interviewers used was as follows:

- a. Thank you for agreeing to stay for our discussion group.
- b. For the next hour we will be talking about things that are good or bad about being your age. We would like to get more information from you about these things so that we can better understand them and how they affect people your age. We hope you will feel comfortable to tell us what you think about these things and how they influence your life or the lives of your friends. Everything that you say will be confidential (kept secret), and we will not be connecting what you say to you. We will be taping this discussion so that we can remember better what has been talked about. After we do these groups at all of the installations that we are going to, we will be listening to all of the tapes and writing a report about what you tell us. We think that it would be good if we get to know each other a little better. We would like to go around the room and have each person tell us your first name, whether you live in housing on the installation or if you live in the community, about how long you have lived here, what type of school you go to, and tell us what you do for fun.
- c. Areas to be discussed included the following questions and statements:
 - What is life like for you?
 - Tell us what you do after school.
 - Do you think the military should have more programs for adolescents?
 - Tell us about your school.
 - Tell us what you do and do not like about your school.
 - Do you think that you are the same or different from adolescents who do not have a parent in the military?
 - What is life like living in a military family?
 - Are these things different from adolescents who do not have a parent living in the military?
 - Do you have friends who do not have parents in the military?
 - Have you had to move a lot?
 - Tell us about your experiences with moving.
 - What is the hardest thing about moving?
 - Are there good things about moving?
 - What are the things that you or people your age worry about?
 - How safe do you feel at this installation or in your neighborhood?
 - Are there ever problems with gangs at your installation?
 - Do you ever have problems with gangs?
 - What other things would you like to tell us about living in a military family?

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave Blank)

2. REPORT DATE
September 1998

3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED
Final November 1997- September 1998

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE

Military Adolescents: Their Strengths and Vulnerabilities
Analysis of Focus Groups

5. FUNDING NUMBERS

F49620-93-1-0586
AFOSR CFDA #12.800

6. AUTHOR(S) Nancy M. Nagy, Douglas Lare, Dorothy J. Jeffreys and
Jeffrey D. Leitzel

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

Military Family Institute
Marywood University
2300 Adams Avenue
Scranton, PA 18509-1598

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT
NUMBER

Military Family Institute (MFI)
Technical Report 98-5

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

AFOSR/NL
110 Duncan Avenue, Suite B115
Bolling AFB, DC 20332-0001

10. SPONSORING/MONITORING
AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

AFOSR/NL
Project Task #7755/00

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

Contracting Officer: Ms. Marilyn J. McKee

12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.

12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)

Three hundred and eighty three (383) adolescents participated in focus groups following the administration of a questionnaire designed to collect broad, baseline data on military adolescents. Topics addressed during the groups ranged from general (e.g., What is life like for you?) to quite specific (e.g., How safe do you feel at this installation or in your neighborhood?). While the adolescents who participated had a predominantly positive view of military family life, they also had a number of concerns. Many discussed problems with school transitions and difficulties with maintaining and initiating friendships with peers due to frequent relocations. The older youths often related the perception that there were no activities provided on installation directed at their age group. Some adolescents felt that social problems would be dramatically reduced if older youths had "somewhere to go" or "something to do" on installation. Recommendations are made on ways that many of the concerns of these adolescents can be addressed. Further research is recommended to better understand the source of the resiliency that these young people seem to possess in the face of frequent disruption of their peer and educational milieus.

14. SUBJECT TERMS military adolescents, mobility, family, family satisfaction,
friendships, school, relationships, safety, activities, recreation, separation, parental
deployment, across-services, duty station location (CONUS vs. OCONUS)

15. NUMBER OF PAGES

43

16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF REPORT

Unclassified

18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF THIS PAGE

Unclassified

19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
OF ABSTRACT

Unclassified

20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT

Unlimited